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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 07/28/08

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Articles:

1) Prime minister slow to make up mind for cabinet shuffle

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
July 28, 2008

It is high time for Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda to shuffle his cabinet. But the prime minister continues to keep mum in defiance of calls from his aides to launch "his own cabinet" to bolster his administration in the wake of the G-8 summit. Putting off a cabinet shuffle to avert risks is certain to raise questions about the prime minister's decision-making capability. The delay might also fuel the race to replace Fukuda.

The prime minister stayed at his official residence on July 26 and 27. Over the weekend, he kept his silence, meeting only with an American political scientist, an old friend.

An LDP executive meeting was held on July 22, the day after the prime minister's vacation was over. In the session, Fukuda

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underlined the need to consider matters comprehensively, irritating party executives. But the prime minister soon sealed off any comment indicative of a cabinet shuffle, saying to the press on July 25, "It's difficult to tell you when I will make a comprehensive decision."

The prime minister is extra cautious because his decision is directly connected with his administration's strategy toward the next extraordinary Diet session, next year's regular Diet session, and Lower House dissolution for a snap general election. The cabinet's support ratings have not markedly increased after the summit. Once the next extraordinary Diet session is convened, the ruling coalition is certain to find itself on the defensive with the Diet divided. With the term of office of the Lower House members scheduled to expire in September 2009, a cabinet shuffle is one of the few offensive means. A veteran LDP noted: "A partial cabinet reshuffle would be tantamount to firing some cabinet ministers. If the cabinet is to be shuffled, it has to be shuffled as a whole."

What is being questioned is the administration's policy line. On economic and fiscal policies, how is the prime minister going to treat Hidenao Nakagawa and others who are advocating a "rising tide policy" and Kaoru Yosano and others who are calling for fiscal reconstruction? The prime minister has flip-flopped his view on a consumption tax hike himself. He has to make up his mind in selecting new cabinet ministers.

The prime minister thinks the current cabinet is well-balanced. For this reason, some think the prime minister would replace only a few of the 15 cabinet ministers he inherited from his successor, Shinzo Abe, such as Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Hiroko Ota and Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Akira Amari. But a minor change would blur the significance of a cabinet shuffle. Some cabinet ministers even indicated that resorting to a cabinet shuffle for bolstering support ratings is improper.

Under the current political timetable, shuffling the cabinet before the end of the month already seems difficult. An informal World Trade Organization (WTO) cabinet ministerial has been extended, and MAFF Minister Masatoshi Wakabayashi and MITI Minister Amari, who are attending the meeting, will not return home until July 31.

2) Cabinet shuffle could slip until after LDP, Komeito heads meet after July 28

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda on July 25 announced that he did not play to meet with New Komeito Representative Akihiro Ota over the weekend to discuss a cabinet shuffle and the timing of convening the extraordinary session of the Diet. Accordingly, the meeting with Ota will now likely be after July 28, making it unavoidable that there will be an impact on the timing of the cabinet shuffle, which the Prime Minister had aimed to be at the end of the month.

The Prime Minister on the evening of the 25th told the press corps at his official residence, "There is nothing strange about the representatives of the ruling coalition meeting together," adding, "There is no particular plan for us to meet this weekend, and it has not been decided when we will meet." At the same time, he also stressed: "I have never once uttered the word 'shuffle', for the

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decision will be made comprehensively based on many factors. I would be in an awkward position if it were said when that comprehensive decision will be made."

On the other hand, a government source close to the Prime Minister, commenting on the cabinet shuffle, indicated that it may have to slip until after the end of the month, with consideration being given to the WTO Doha Round ministerial meeting having encountered rough going, and the need to quickly come up with measures to deal with agricultural issues.

3) Will Taro Aso be in the shuffled cabinet or will he reject an appointment?

TOKYO (Page 2) (Abridged)
July 28, 2008

With speculation rampant in the ruling camp that Prime Minister Fukuda will soon shuffle his cabinet and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) executive lineup, all eyes are turned with attention to the moves of former LDP Secretary General Taro Aso, a candidate for Fukuda's post once he steps down.

Since he ran and lost against Fukuda in the LDP presidential race last September, Aso has been content not to have an official post, but he has been actively stumping around the country, making approximately 150 stops in 10 months, or an average of one stop every two days.

For Prime Minister Fukuda, whose approval ratings in the polls have been low, if he appoints the extremely popular Aso to an important cabinet post or party executive position, he can expect a boost in his administration's ratings, while displaying party unity. But there is a possibility he might be shut out over his campaigning to topple the cabinet.

Actually, when the Prime Minister last September was forming his cabinet, he sounded out Aso on a cabinet seat, but the view then in the Machimura faction (Aso's faction) was that he would not accept a position at that time.

However, for Aso, who wants to sit in the prime minister's seat, in case the Prime Minister sounds him out for a cabinet post, how he will respond will be an important issue.

4) New Komeito eyeing Lower House dissolution late this year or early next year

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
July 28, 2008

The New Komeito, the junior coalition partner of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), is now taking a stance of making specific requests of the way Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda is managing his administration, having in mind dissolution of the House of Representatives and general election late this year or early next

year. The party has called for convening the next extraordinary Diet session in mid-September or later, aiming to put off the issue of extending the New Antiterrorism Special Measures Law, which allows Japan to conduct refueling operations in the Indian Ocean. It has also asked the government to change the policy of curbing expenditures that has been in place since the government of Prime

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Minister Junichiro Koizumi. In order to display its own political presence, the party wants to have spare time between the next Lower House election and the Tokyo Metropolitan assembly election to be held next June or July.

New Komeito leader Akihiro Ota in a speech on July 25 in the city of Tajimi, Gifu Prefecture, stressed: "It is important for us to change to a policy of helping the socially weak and the people's livelihoods rather than a policy of advocating the principle of market mechanisms." In a meeting on the 24th of the party's Policy Research Council, many participants said that they were unable to agree to the government's policy of reducing by 220 billion yen per year the level of social security spending.

Secretary General Kazuo Kitagawa, referring to the issue of extending the new antiterrorism law at a press conference on the 24th, sought to counter a view in the LDP calling for convening the extra Diet session in late August, expecting resistance from the opposition camp. He stated: "It is important to secure the understanding of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the public."

The reason for the New Komeito calling on the Fukuda administration to shift its policy is because many supporters of the party have increasingly become unhappy with the fact that the Komeito's principle of placing importance on social welfare and peace has been blindsided under the LDP-New Komeito coalition regime. Since the term of the Lower House members will expire next September, a senior New Komeito member expressed concern, saying: "The LDP lacks a sense of tension toward the election. If nothing is done, the Prime Minister will be forced to dissolve the Lower House, in which the possibility is that we will be defeated."

In the New Komeito, some have now questioned that the Lower House will be carried out the leadership of Fukuda, whose popularity has been low. As senior party member said: "Since the Prime Minister's view is similar to that of our party, we cannot openly urge him to step down. However, we have indirectly warned the LDP to consider the situation."

5) DPJ to oppose antiterror law extension: Hatoyama

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
July 26, 2008

The leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) will oppose a government-planned bill revising the new Antiterrorism Special Measures Law for continuing the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean, DPJ Secretary General Hatoyama told a press conference yesterday. "We're basically unlikely to vote for that bill," Hatoyama said.

The government is planning to present the bill to the Diet at its forthcoming extraordinary session, which is expected to be convened in late August. However, Hatoyama criticized the MSDF's refueling mission. He said: "For the sake of peace and stability in Afghanistan, it makes no sense at all. We should stop." He also revealed that he has told his party's foreign affairs and defense division to work out a plan for Japan's contribution to Afghanistan's reconstruction.

6-1) DPJ Secretary General Hatoyama reveals plan to reconsider

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Afghanistan assistance

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
July 26, 2008

Democratic Party of Japan Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama, speaking to the press on July 25, indicated that his party would reconsider a set of Afghanistan support measures put together last year by the party. Hatoyama said: "We will closely examine the package and will add new measures if necessary. Whatever the situation, it's our responsibility to crystallize the party's thinking. If necessary, we will cooperate (with the government). We will not oppose plans devised by the government simply for the sake of opposition."

Late last year, the DPJ submitted to the Diet an antiterrorism bill including Afghanistan support measures. The bill is now in the Lower House for deliberations. The bill is designed to allow SDF personnel to carry out strictly humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, such as medical services, in Afghanistan once a ceasefire agreement is reached between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

6-2) DPJ Secretary General Hatoyama: If Government presents new proposal, DPJ would approve that proposal

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
July 28, 2008

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama at a press conference on July 25 revealed that his party was studying counterproposals toward the government's plan to extend the New Antiterrorism Special Measures Law, which will become a major issue at the next ordinary Diet session. He stated: "If the government's plans do not run counter to ours, we have no intention to oppose all government ideas just because they are proposed by the government."

Hatoyama indicated the possibility that if the government presented a new proposal to replace the Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) refueling operations in the Indian Ocean, the DPJ would approve it.

The DPJ submitted to the previous regular Diet session a bill dispatching Self-Defense Force (SDF) personnel overseas limiting to reconstruction activities in cease-fire agreed areas. The House of Representatives has decided to carry it over for further deliberations. With this bill in mind, Hatoyama stated: "After examining carefully, if necessary, we will incorporate new policy measures."

However, the government has judged that it would difficult to dispatch the SDF to Afghanistan based on the result of a report by a fact-finding team. The New Komeito, the junior coalition of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has begun showing reluctance to extend the New Antiterrorism Special Measures Law by taking a revote in the Lower House. However, a DPJ policy official said: "Our party has not actually carried out the study of counterproposals."

7) Nakaima points to tacit understanding on moving Futenma replacement facility offshore

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
July 26, 2008

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Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima in a regular press conference on July 25 indicated that the government's plan to relocate Futenma Air Station to Nago would be revised in response to Okinawa's call for moving the envisaged replacement facility offshore, saying: "My understanding it that we have reached a tacit understanding (with the government)."

Nakaima touched on a Futenma relocation consultative council meeting held on July 18 between the central and Okinawa governments. Referring to the decision to set up working teams for eliminating the danger of Futenma Air Station and for an environmental impact assessment of the replacement facility, Nakaima explained: "Working-level talks will start because there is a tacit understanding on removing the replacement facility."

8) Defense Ministry admits to inappropriate spending

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Abridged)
July 26, 2008

The Defense Ministry yesterday announced a plan to improve its spending in connection with its practice of pooling money with fictitious receipts mainly for the purpose of gathering intelligence. This announcement means that the Defense Ministry has effectively admitted to its inappropriate control of incentive money, which used to be separately in the hands of each section's head. According to the announced plan, the defense minister's secretariat will handle and control such incentive money. The plan also says the Defense Ministry will clarify for what purpose the money is used. When it comes to the pooled money, however, the plan goes no further than to say the Defense Ministry is "still checking" such off-the-book money.

The Defense Ministry has now set forth such an improvement measure without unveiling the facts about its practice of making off-the-book money and pooling money. This response, however, is rather unnatural. The Defense Ministry's ability to clean itself up will likely be called into question again.

9) Defense Ministry to make budget request for F-15 upgrade

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Abridged)
July 28, 2008

The Defense Ministry has decided to make a budget request for next fiscal year to upgrade the Air Self-Defense Force's F-15 fighter jets. The amount of expenditures required for more than 10 F-15 fighters would exceed the framework set for improvement outlays under the government's current midterm defense buildup plan for fiscal 2005-2009. However, the Defense Ministry deemed it indispensable to upgrade the F-15s because it has been falling behind schedule in screening and selecting the follow-on mainstay fighter (FX) for the ASDF.

The Defense Ministry has plans to modernize the F-15, including enhancing the performance of its radar and computer systems. This upgrade is considered for a total of about 40 F-15s or two squadrons in order to cope with China's growing air power and other situational changes. The Defense Ministry has already earmarked improvement costs for 26 F-15s within the current midterm defense buildup plan's framework, and it had planned to make a budget request for the remaining more than 10 F-15s under the next midterm

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defense buildup plan.

The Defense Ministry planned to acquire seven FX planes under the current midterm defense buildup plan, with the F-22 Raptor, a U.S.-developed state-of-the-art stealth fighter, as a likely candidate. However, the United States has placed an embargo on foreign sales of the F-22. This has made it difficult for the Defense Ministry to select the FX model. The Defense Ministry will therefore put off its FX selection to the next midterm defense buildup plan. Instead, the ministry decided to move up the F-15 upgrade plan. It will earmark upgrade costs for more than 10 F-15s in its next fiscal year budget, and their upgrade is estimated at around 30 billion yen or so.

10) Japan considering introduction of international solidarity levies to be imposed on airline tickets, etc.: Financing development assistance eyed

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top Play) (Excerpts)
July 28, 2008

The government on July 27 launched discussions on the propriety of introducing an international solidarity tax for currency trading activities and airline ticket purchases to help finance assistance to development countries. It will shortly join an international organization formally that is promoting the so-called international

solidarity levy.

The aim is to achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aimed at resolving poverty in developing countries and secure funds to help developing countries promote measures against global warming. Since funds from the official development assistance (ODA) program alone do not suffice to finance development assistance, the establishment of an innovative method of procuring funds, such as the solidarity levy, has become an international challenge.

Specifically, the government is mulling introducing a currency transaction development tax of as low as 0.005 PERCENT on foreign currency trading activities. It also plans to implement an airline ticket levy, which allows it to collect taxes from relatively affluent people.

11) Japan set to accept mediation plan in WTO trade talks

NIKKEI (Page 1) (Excerpts)
July 28, 2008

(Baba, Geneva)

The Japanese government yesterday started discussing the possibility of accepting a mediation plan presented by WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy and others in a ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Japan, which had complained of a lack of measures to protect farm products during seven years of negotiations, judges that making a concession is now unavoidable. Participants are aiming to reach a general agreement next week, after ironing out differences in their positions.

The new round of WTO global trade talks (Doha Round) has brought together 153 countries and regions. The Doha Round is tasked with setting rules to uniformly cut tariffs on farm and industrial products in a bid to expand global trade.

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In an effort to bring about a general agreement, Lamy submitted the mediation plan on July 25. The plan included specific numerical targets for about 20 items, such as a measure to set the maximum ratio of "sensitive" agricultural products for which high tariffs are exceptionally allowed to the total at 4 PERCENT and at 6 PERCENT with conditions. Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshiaki Amari indicated on July 26 that negotiations were moving toward a general agreement, remarking: "Argentina alone is raising opposition. Countries' views are being gradually unified." Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Masatoshi Wakabayashi acknowledged yesterday that the round has reached a decisive phase.

If countries agree, Lamy intends to present a formal plan for agreement possibly on the afternoon of the 28th. He plans to conduct discussions in the ministerial meeting and a plenary session to be held by all participant countries and seek their agreement.

12) WTO chairman's mediation plan presses Japan to make tough choice in farm sector

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
Evening, July 26, 2008

(Ichimura, Geneva)

In an effort to strike a broad agreement on rules for liberalizing trade in agricultural and industrial products, World Trade Organization (WTO) Director General Pascal Lamy and others compiled a mediation plan. This chairman's report urges countries to make a difficult choice. Specifically, the report requires Japan to set the maximum ratio of mainstay or "sensitive" farm products, for which high tariffs are exceptionally allowed, to 6 PERCENT of the total and change its conventional policy of agricultural protection. Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Masatoshi Wakabayashi has said: "Japan will aim at securing 8 PERCENT," but Japan may be pressed for a compromise in the end.

In the farm sector, the Agriculture Ministry is concerned most about the number of mainstay items. The mediation plan sets the ratio of such items to the total at 4 PERCENT in principle for industrialized countries in accordance with a proposal by Western countries but at 6 PERCENT only for Japan and Switzerland. In the case of Japan, however, the number of farm products on which a more than 100 PERCENT tariff has been imposed, such as rice, dairy products, and sugar, is 125, accounting for 9.4 PERCENT of the total. Japan is set to continue insisting that the proposed 6 PERCENT is not enough to protect such sensitive items.

In exchange for reducing the margin of tariff cuts for mainstay items, expanding low-tariff import quotas is required. Japan requested that the ratio of expansion be at up to 4 PERCENT of domestic demand. The mediation plan accepted Japan's request. The report notes that the special safeguard system, under which domestic farm products will be protected with higher tariff rates introduced when imports sharply increase, be phased out in seven years, dismissing Japan's call for maintaining the system.

In the industrial sector, in which Japan is aiming to expand exports, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) is dissatisfied with the proposed tariff cuts for emerging countries.

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The mediation plan allows emerging countries to choose one of these upper limits on tariff rates in compliance with the scope of exceptional tariffs - 20 PERCENT, 22 PERCENT, and 25 PERCENT - but METI is aiming to have the rates lowered further. Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath, however, said that these rates are acceptable. Stormy negotiations are expected.

The ratio of items under the application of a provision on minimizing exceptional items from tariff reductions to the total items in a specific industry is set at 20 PERCENT in terms of quantity and at 9 PERCENT in terms of value in the mediation plan. To make this provision stricter and to prevent a loophole, Japan wants to raise the ratio in terms of import value to over 10 PERCENT at least.

However, emerging countries that give priority to growing domestic industries, such as Brazil and India, are complaining about this. In future negotiations, heated debate is expected on this point.

13) Japanese-South Korean exchanges frozen due to Takeshima issue;
104 events cancelled or put off

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Abridged)
July 28, 2008

Following the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology having included in a teaching guideline for social studies for junior high schools a claim of sovereignty over the islets called Takeshima in Japan (Dokdo in South Korea), which the South Korean government also claims, the Kyodo News Agency learned on July 27 that 104 exchange events between Japan and South Korea planned by municipalities in 33 prefectures have been cancelled, put off or scaled down.

The requests came from the South Korean side. Although Japan-South Korea relations were previously strained because of the visits to Yasukuni Shrine by then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, ties later appeared to have got better. Now, the Takeshima issue has had a negative impact on the grass-root level exchanges. One municipal official in charge made this comment with annoyance: "It is regrettable that the political issue has affected children who looked forward to visiting South Korea in the summer vacation."

Kyodo conducted a survey on the matter in prefectures and government-designated cities on July 25. Most of the events that have been cancelled are visits to South Korea by elementary and junior high school students, and by teachers and school heads, as well as sports events. Of the 104 events, 63 have been cancelled, 16 have been postponed, and another 16 have been suspended or are under coordination. The South Korean side has decided not to participate

in five events that were expected to be held in Japan. Four events that also were planned to be held in Japan have been scaled down. Of the events that Tottori Prefecture had planned, 12 have been cancelled and four have been under coordination. A total of 16 that have been cancelled or under coordination is a largest number among those of the prefectures, followed by seven events of Gifu Prefecture, six of Akita, Kanagawa and Fukuoka prefectures.

One of the events cancelled is Fukuoka Municipal Fukuoka Girls School's plan to visit a sister school in Pusan City from July 25.

14) Fifty South Korean lawmakers propose submitting resolution

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claiming that Tsushima is also their territory

SANKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
July 28, 2008

Seoul, Katsuhiko Kuroda

Anti-Japanese movements generated by the Takeshima issue are continuing in South Korea to protest Japan's describing in its teaching manuals for school curriculums guidelines for social studies for middle schools confrontation between Japan and South Korea over the Takeshima Island (known as Dokdo by South Korea). Meanwhile, fifty South Korea lawmakers of the ruling and opposition parties have proposed submitting a resolution demanding the return of Tsushima Islands, claiming that Japan's Tsushima is also South Korea's territory.

Overheated

Tsushima Islands (Tsushima City, Nagasaki Prefecture with a population of about 50,000) are islands located north of Kyushu. They are also only 50 kilometers away from South Korea's southernmost city of Pusan. The islands have had deep relations with the Korean Peninsula since early times. South Koreans have recently come to assert that Tsushima also belongs to South Korea, when they want to express retaliatory feelings against Japan over Takeshima Island. The claim has nuisance value and is almost humorous.

The Masan City Assembly established the Tsushima Day several years ago as retaliation against the Takeshima Island Day Ordinance enacted by the Shimane Prefectural Assembly. The South Korean press extensively reported that members of groups calling for defending Dokdo at all cost visited Tsushima and marched in front of the city hall, holding up banners carrying a slogan that "Tsushima is South Korea's territory."

However, this is the first time for such a large number of lawmakers to seriously propose submitting a resolution to the National Assembly. When they will formally submit such a resolution is unclear. Some lawmakers are critical of the move, saying, "If they do that, some may think our country's justifiable claim may be groundless."

Grounds

The envisaged resolution notes that South Korea's documents from the Yi Dynasty so claim, that the genes of Tsushima residents are identical with those of South Koreans, that South Korea's first President Rhee Syng Man once stated that Tsushima had been its territory with a long history of tributary diplomacy to South Korea, and that a resolution demanding the return of Tsushima was submitted to the first National Assembly in 1949.

All those claims are sheer nonsense. In South Korea, however, when it comes to confrontation between Japan and South Korea, the South Korean public is given only self-centered and unilateral information as can be seen in the case of the Takeshima (Dokdo) issue. There is a rumor around that South Korean tourists visiting Tsushima are already openly claiming that Tsushima is South Korea's territory.

The writer of the relic "Dokdo is our land," a popular song known to everybody in South Korea, in an interview given recently said that a

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phrase in the song that "Tsushima is Japan's land" should be changed to "Tsushima is also our land." The fixed notion that Tsushima is also South Korea's territory may spread in the South Korea society.

SCHIEFFER